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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

PT 343 JCS

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

November 20, 1978

TO: P - Ambassador David Newsom
FROM: CA - Barbara M. Watson
SUBJECT: CODEL Ryan -- Killings in Guyana and
Consular Preparations

SITUATION IN JONESTOWN

Preliminary Briefings

The Department learned early this September that Congressman Ryan intended to visit Guyana and the People's Temple. The Congressman had received appeals and complaints from constituents about the condition of children and relatives in Jonestown; he wished to follow up this activity personally. Department officials held their first meeting with the Congressman on September 17 and the last one on November 13, the day before he left. Between those dates, ARA. L, and CA frequently discussed the trip with the Congressman and his staff. On these occasions the Congressman was told it could be dangerous to fly into a primitive airstrip in the midst of very rugged country. He was also aware that the People's Temple community was opposed to his visit. Defectors from the Temple group had reported the presence of guns in the community, plus such practices as physical abuse and even dry run suicide drills. Since June of 1977 approximately 7 consular visits were made to Jonestown to look into allegations that Jonestown residents were being abused. No clear indications of abuse were obtained. Relatives of Jonestown residents continue to say "would be" defectors are either being brainwashed or intimidated. While the Department was aware that Jonestown was tense, we saw less reason to interpose reservations between the Congressman and his American constituents because our own consular officers had done -- without any harm or threat to themselves -- what the Congressman was planning to do.

The Shootings

The ambush which killed Congressman Ryan and four others and wounded nine more has been reported. Confirmed also is that Guyana Security Forces after carefully

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Current Activity - Additional Personnel

The total Jonestown community may in fact not much exceed the 400 dead. Accounts that the community numbers more than 1,000, may be exaggerations.

Congressman Ryan's family wishes his body transported directly to San Francisco for a Wednesday funeral at the Golden Gate National Cemetery. Three other dead also we think may be buried in California. The fifth victim resided in Ohio.

Guyanese police say some of the Jonestown dead died by poison and others gunshot wounds. For legal prognostics, sample autopsies are being made from both groups. Guyana law requires burial within 36 hours. It has so far not been possible to identify the next of kin but in many cases we believe they would not want to be responsible for the costs of transport or even burial. Also, the return of these dead at U.S. Government expense would be a precedent. Under existing regulations if financial arrangements cannot be made to return a dead American, consular officers arrange for local burial. The matter, however, is being intensively studied. A mass burial of such a pathetic group could look a little heartless. The climate, communications, and Guyanese law might in the end make local burial obligatory.

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Aircraft

Nine wounded returned to the U.S. via a C-141 last night. They were met by Miss Watson. Aircraft are available to bring back a great many dead and any wounded (who may yet be discovered). A C-141 is on the ground in Georgetown and may return this afternoon or evening -- perhaps carrying the bodies. Another C-141 arrives today. At least two other aircraft (C-130's) will be in Georgetown by tonight or tomorrow morning. They are carrying helicopter assembly equipment and supplies. A C-5A may fly in tomorrow with additional helicopters. Helicopters will break the bottleneck of access to Jonestown which now is only via a Guyanese 18 passenger Otter and another 5-seat aircraft.

Mark Lane

The well-known criminal lawyer, Mark Lane, who represented the Rev. Jim Jones is in Georgetown. Some how he made his way to the capital from Jones settlement. A report from the Embassy is expected momentarily.

Press

Miss Watson will be interviewed by Susan King for WDVN-TV (Channel 9) at 2:00 p.m. today.

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